

VZCZCXRO6752
RR RUEHROV
DE RUEHDS #0210 0281017
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 281017Z JAN 09
FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3527
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 4438
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 7678

UNCLAS ADDIS ABABA 000210

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR IP/RHS (AOSTERMEIR AND GPATEL),
DRL/MLGA (CSIBILLA),
IO/PSC (DODELL)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [ET](#)

SUBJECT: POST ASSESSMENT OF OHCHR EAST AFRICA REGIONAL
OFFICE

REF: STATE 2023

¶1. (SBU) This cable responds to reftel,s request for Post,s assessment of the efficacy of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) East Africa Regional Office in Addis Ababa. The East Africa Regional Office covers countries in the East and Horn of Africa, focusing primarily on Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Kenya, and Tanzania.

OHCHR Activities -----

¶2. (SBU) The OHCHR provides technical assistance and capacity-building activities to the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (HRC). However, to date the HRC remains largely ineffective. The OHCHR works in collaboration with the UN Economic Commission for Africa in drafting and reviewing reports and publications, organizing development forums, promoting public participation in development through the Committee on Human Development and Civil Society, and promoting the rights of women and gender equality in partnership with the African Center for Gender Development. The OHCHR also participates in UN Country Team meetings to inform and advocate on human rights issues. The OHCHR offers advice on strategic planning and technical assistance to the African Union (AU) and answers queries from AU member states, civil society organizations, and other partners. Last year, the OHCHR worked with the Secretariat of the AU to create a specialized library for human rights, governance, and democracy. The OHCHR leads the development and implementation of the UN-AU ten-year capacity-building program on human rights. In addition, the OHCHR works with government ministries to draft reports mandated by UN and AU treaty bodies. In the coming year the OHCHR plans to implement a two-year program in Djibouti to strengthen civil society organizations and the human rights commission, and train police in human rights.

Post Assessment -----

¶3. (SBU) East Africa is beset with complex human rights challenges, including inter-state war, insurgencies, and ethnic and religious strife that has displaced tens of thousands of people. Facing an (appropriately) perceived threat of being expelled from Ethiopia if it reports on human rights abuses in Ethiopia, OHCHR does not engage the Ethiopian Government (GoE) to either seek greater access for monitoring or to convey concerns on GoE practices. The OHCHR in Addis Ababa produces little in the way of reporting, with the possible exception of internal reports. The OHCHR staff cited lack of resources as its main challenge and noted that

the office,s location in Ethiopia effectively impedes its ability to engage Eritrea. Currently, the OHCHR office in Addis Ababa has only three expatriate and four local staff members. Although OHCHR needs more personnel to cover such a complex region, the office has made little effort to engage on the numerous and serious issues that fall within their mandate. For example, they have not done any credible reporting on, or investigation into, Ethiopia,s counterinsurgency operations in the Ogaden, which have received widespread criticism from other sources in the human rights community. As a result, Post assesses OHCHR to be an ineffective advocate for, and feckless monitor of, human rights in Ethiopia at this time.

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